**Literacy Biography**

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My father was born in Iran and will always be Persian, as he likes to say. Leaving home at 18, my father escaped to England to study and then eventually finished his schooling in Oklahoma here in the States. As I think about my literacy experiences, I am inclined to think of my father and how inspired he was to leave home to study. My father has always been a strong advocate of studying and especially reading. He is constantly reading his Iranian newspaper and poetry. While in school, he would always remind my sister and I how important reading was. On my last visit to Iran, I noticed this more than ever maybe because I was older, but it was interesting to see how my cousins in the university were constantly reading and writing. They loved to get their hands on any literature they could. Even the small children loved pencils, pens, notebooks, and journals as gifts. Every year my father took us on a visit, we would take these things and I remember how weird that was. Why would children want pens, pencils, and journals over toys? As an American, I saw what kind of sophisticated toys we had compared to the homemade toys made in a poor town with dirt roads and no indoor plumbing. These children were elated with pencils, pens, and notebooks. I kept asking myself is there something wrong with me or them? It is interesting now to see how children from a third world country such as Iran had much more experience writing and reading then I did as a privileged American child with whatever I wanted or needed at my fingertips.

My mother was definitely the bookworm of the family. You could barely talk to her if she had her nose in a book. I think I will call her the emotional reader. I remember seeing her crying or laughing reading a book. I wonder sometimes if she not wished she were some of the characters with different lives she read about. I think sometimes she wanted a different life so bad she would read to escape reality. I don’t remember her being truly happy that much. It is awkward now to think my mother reacted more to a book than sometimes her own children. Anyway, her ideal vacation was the library. She would always take my sister and me on Saturday’s. Hours would pass at the library ending with my sister and I begging at her feet to leave for ice cream. Don’t get me wrong. My sister and I loved to read when we were children, but we knew if we weren’t nagging her we

would be camping out in the nonfiction section. My mother was also the one who read to us as children and bought us books. We knew she just got paid if we were heading to Borders or Barnes and Noble.

Goosebumps, Babysitter’s Club, Where the Sidewalk Ends, all lined my bookshelf when I was a child. I remember reading Babysitter’s Club and dreaming of the day I would have my own club where parents could drop off their children and I or a group of friends could all babysit together. I always enjoyed RL Stine and how he would make my eyes bulge at night wondering if anything was going to pop out from under my bed. In Middle School, I really became interested in poetry after we did a Reading unit on James Whitcomb Riley. I was fascinated by words poets would put together in a way they would make sense and mean something. I became obsessed with work by Emily Dickenson, Shel Silverstein, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost. I would try to come up with my own poetry, but it never gave me joy like the poems I read would. My father would always tell me poetry was beautiful and should be read with passion. He would read me poems in Farsi and it always sounded like a song. He would then translate it to English, but it always sounded better in Farsi. I grew up writing letters to my cousins in Iran and they would always write back in poems and again the words were more meaningful in Farsi. I would try to write back in poems, but the English never seemed to flow. My cousins were so artistic. They would draw pictures that would go along with the words and I would always admire their work. How did I not know how to write poetry? Why were my cousins constantly writing beautiful writings? I started to study a lot on my own. When my mother told us we were going to the library I was the first one in the car. I read any poetry I could get my hands on and I started to teach myself how to write. I would write poems in English and then have my father translate them to Farsi. I would make him read it back to me to see how it sounded. I didn’t care if it didn’t flow in English. I wanted it to sound perfect in Farsi so my cousins could hear my song.

The next time I visited Iran I went to class with a cousin of mine for a week. I watched how they wrote and read half the day and did math the other half. I remembered how in the States I had one math class for 50 minutes, literature for 50 minutes, where we read a little, and then the rest of the day I took notes in whatever Science, History, or Econ class I had. I came back home studying harder than ever. I began my college years at Butler University my freshman year starting with a major in International Business and minor in Spanish. I became very interested in Latin American literature. My favorite books included The House of Spirits, by Isabel Allende and One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. After having my beautiful daughter, I transferred to Indiana University in Bloomington. I decided teaching was a more suitable career for myself especially now having a child. I was not willing to travel and leave her. I changed majors to elementary education and started to read a lot of novels about the Middle East on my own. My favorite novel was Palace Walk by Naguib Mahfouz. During this time, I had traveled less and less to Iran and wrote less and less to my cousins.

And here is where it ends. I am now a fourth grade teacher at Maple Grove Elementary in Greenwood, Indiana. As a childhood reader and writer, I now am left to teach the students of the future how important it is to read and write while I find less and less time to read and write for myself. That is where the change has come in. I vow to be an avid reader and writer myself so then I can be able to transfer what I am learning and have learned to my students and especially my daughter. Then, maybe only then they will become lifelong readers and writers.